

## *Washtenaw County Breastfeeding Coalition (WCBC)*



December 9, 2013

Senator Rick Jones  
P.O. Box 30036  
Lansing, MI 48909-7536

Dear Senator Jones:

On behalf of the Washtenaw County Breastfeeding Coalition, **we are writing in support of Senate Bill 674**, the bill to protect the right to breastfeed. WCBC is an all-volunteer organization founded in 2005. Membership includes representatives from University of Michigan Health System, St. Joseph Mercy Health System, WIC, La Leche League, Washtenaw County Public Health Department, and other agencies. Together we aim to increase local efforts to improve infant health by making breastfeeding the societal norm in Washtenaw County.

SB 674 bill will allow women to breastfeed in any public or private location where the mother and infant are otherwise authorized to be. Forty-five states and the District of Columbia and the Virgin Islands have such laws – Michigan is one of only 5 states that does not. Unfortunately, Michigan also ranks in the bottom 25% of states in the nation for breastfeeding initiation and duration.

To better promote and support breastfeeding, Michigan must create a more supportive environment. Today, many mothers feel uncomfortable breastfeeding in public. In 2012, the Washtenaw County Breastfeeding collected the following testimonials:

- *"I am pregnant and expecting my baby in September. I heard many horror stories about breastfeeding in public. It's unfortunate that moms have to either be home bound or be forced to use bottles. Why should we be punished for doing what's best for our children?"*
- *"My main concern is breastfeeding in public. I am very worried about being told it's 'inappropriate' and being accused of indecent exposure! I really want to breastfeed as it is special for so many reasons – the bonding, the cost savings, and the health benefits for both mother and baby."*
- *"Whenever I am out I always mentally check if I'm within the Ann Arbor city limits because I know I'm protected from harassment then. If I'm not, I'm very nervous about what someone might say."*
- *"I'm scared to breastfeed in public because of what people think and what comments they would say to me. If there were signs that said it was allowed I would feel better because it lets people know ahead of time."*
- *"I am very nervous about nursing in public. People stare at you, kids stare at you, men stare at you. I'm scared because of all the people who will stare at me. If I was protected or someplace where it was okay to nurse, I would feel much more comfortable to nurse in public."*

### **WCBC Co-Chair**

Gayathri Akella, MS, RD, IBCLC

### **Washtenaw County WIC**

### **WCBC Co-chair**

Keleigh Lee, MA, IBCLC, LLL

### **Private Practice**

### **La Leche League**

### **WCBC Secretary**

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### **Washtenaw County WIC**

### **Breastfeeding Peer Counselor**

### **WCBC Treasurer**

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### **Saint Joseph Mercy Hospital**

### **La Leche League**

### **WCBC Members**

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### **Washtenaw County WIC**

Ruth Kraut

### **Washtenaw County Public Health**

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### **Briarwood Health Associates**

### **University of Michigan**

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### **School of Public Health**

### **University of Michigan**

Georgia Therrien

### **Medela**

Julie Lothamer

### **Michigan Department of**

### **Community Health/WIC**

Patty Brennan

### **Center for the Childbearing Years**

Barbara Robertson

### **Breastfeeding Center of Ann Arbor**

Ruby Shapiro

### **Saint Joseph Mercy Hospital**

To help protect local breastfeeding families, in 2006 the City of Ann Arbor passed a local ordinance protecting the right of mothers to breastfeed in public. In 2012, the Washtenaw County Breastfeeding Coalition worked with Washtenaw County Public Health and the Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners to pass a resolution that states a mother may breastfeed her baby in any location, public or private, where the mother and her child are otherwise authorized to be in all County leased and owned buildings and property, and at all County-sponsored meetings, regardless of location. These local policies were necessary because of the lack of legal protection at the state level.

We urge the Committee on Judiciary to vote SB 674 out of committee and support its passage in the full senate. This bill is a first step to promoting and protecting breastfeeding in Michigan.

We are available as a resource if you would like to further discuss the importance of community support for breastfeeding.

Sincerely,



Gayathri Akella, MS, RD, CLE  
WCBC Co-Chair



Keleigh Lee, MFA, LLL  
WCBC Co-Chair